



Photos by Karl Weisel

A pair of knights welcomes visitors to Ronneburg Castle. Photo right: a view of the medieval fortress.

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The Middle Ages are never far from mind or view in modern-day Germany. Despite the ever-present accoutrements of contemporary existence — high-speed automobiles, towering skyscrapers and humans with their heads attached to tiny communication devices — the past is alive and well all over the country.

While newcomers to Germany quickly discover the everyday remnants such as villages full of half-timbered houses and age-old churches, weekends are times to explore some of the more imposing structures such as river valley castles and monasteries farther afield.

But one need not travel a great distance to get the feeling of having truly stepped back into a time when the country was ruled by feudal landowners, knights and the long arm of the church.

Heading northeast from Frankfurt past Hanau toward Büdingen (or southeast from Giessen) takes one to a sleepy farming valley watched over by an imposing castle set on a hilltop of basalt rock. First mentioned in the history books as a 13th-century fortification from which officials controlled the trade route between the Wetterau and Main River regions, Ronneburg eventually fell into the hands of the principality of Ysenburg and Büdingen in 1476.

In the 16th century the castle took its current form after undergoing massive construction and retained that shape through the centuries until today. It is acknowledged to be one of the few vital German castles from that period to have come through various wars and natural catastrophes since its construction relatively unscathed. Reconstruction and repairs over the past decade have restored the castle to give visitors a more accurate impression of what life must have been like for its medieval inhabitants.

Nearly every weekend, particularly during the summer months, visitors will find a host of special events held in and

around the castle. Various re-enactment groups converge on Ronneburg to re-create the atmosphere and ambience of the Middle Ages. Medieval markets, jousting tournaments and various other events are featured on a regular basis.

On July 24, 25, Aug. 7 and 8 young and old can try their hands with the bow and crossbow. On Aug. 21 and 22 the castle will hold an exhibition of medieval life. Various re-enactment groups will be on hand throughout the castle in appropriate attire depicting life in a medieval kitchen and the other rooms of the castle.

On Sept. 25, 26, Oct. 2, 3, 9 and 10 the castle grounds will turn into one big medieval village with musicians, artisans, jugglers, fools, knights and other personalities on hand to breathe life back into the massive castle walls.

But even on days when the castle isn't featuring special events, it is definitely worth a visit. After passing through the gate, one has a choice of either relaxing in the castle restaurant or paying the museum entrance fee to explore the many rooms and towers of the fortification.

Admission to the castle is €3.50 for adults, €2.50 for children or €11 for a family ticket (families with two or more children).

Pedal-powered well

The first stop upon entry is the Brunnenhaus, or well room, where visitors can peer into a lighted well stretching some 96 meters down into the basalt rockface. A pedal-powered device was used to draw water up from the well.

Other rooms include a weapons chamber with medieval armor and armaments, the castle kitchen including a huge 16th-century stove upon which meals are still prepared during special occasions, sleeping and living rooms with ornately carved furniture, a medieval drugstore and more. Children will get a kick out of trying on a half-opened suit of armor — suitable for photos — and climbing up the many staircases to high look-out points over the surrounding countryside. Medieval toilets set over holes in the castle

walls and built into age-old thrones may come as a surprise to some visitors.

The castle is open daily except Mondays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. March 1 through Nov. 30. It is closed Dec. 1 to Feb. 28. The castle restaurant is open Wednesday to Sunday starting at 11 a.m. Warm meals are served during those days from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5:30-9 p.m. The restaurant also features medieval dinners throughout the year with the next evenings scheduled for Sept. 15, Oct. 21, Nov. 18 and Dec. 16 at 8 p.m. Cost is €52 per person. Call civ (06048) 7130 or visit the www.restaurant-ronneburg.de website for details.

Ronneburg also offers a falconry exhibition featuring various hunting birds including falcons, hawks and owls. Shows are Tuesday to Friday and Sunday at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., Saturdays at 3 and 5 p.m. For information about falconry and tours of Ronneburg call civ (06048) 950 905.

A grassy area next to the Ronneburg is also the site of a paragliding school. People interested in the sport can watch as novices make their first attempts at flying with a parachute. For more information about various classes available through the school visit the www.hotsport.de website.

Those with more time on their hands may also want to travel a few miles north from Ronneburg to the age-old walled city of Büdingen. The home to Armstrong Barracks, Büdingen traces its roots back to the time of the Celts — a life-size statue of a Celtic prince and various other remnants having been unearthed in the nearby hills.

Today visitors can stroll through the Jerusalem Gate and wander into a town where half-timbered houses, cobblestone streets and centuries-old dwellings and churches all squeeze together forming narrow passageways through which pedestrians make their way.

To get a better idea of the history of the town visit Büdingen's Castle Museum in the town center which is open every day except Monday. Admission is €4 for adults, €3 for children over age 6.



Photo courtesy of Ronneburg

Spectators are treated to a test of swordsmanship during a medieval tournament at Ronneburg. Photo below: A lone peacock stands guard on the castle rampart.



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Castle visitors examine one of the many rooms of the Ronneburg — a medieval pharmacy. Photo right: people celebrate their wedding in the castle accompanied by renaissance music and servers dressed in period costume. Ronneburg features various special events throughout the year and is open to use by groups for special occasions such as weddings.

